

## Section 7: Public Involvement



Photo: Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

### 7.1 Overview

A major tenet of ecosystem management is continuous involvement of the public that is inclusive and respectful of all viewpoints and stakeholders. All the partners involved in the LaMP process have long been committed to an open, fair and significant public involvement process. The key to public support and the program's success is effective communication between the government agencies and the diverse population of the Lake Erie basin.

To keep the public apprised of progress in the LaMP, the U.S. and Canadian governments maintain a broad-based mailing list of the public interested in the LaMP progress or who are involved in other environmental activities in the Lake Erie basin. From time to time, information concerning the Lake Erie LaMP is sent to people on the mailing list to foster an active network of the public interested in Lake Erie-related environmental issues.

To provide another mechanism for public involvement, the U.S. and Canadian governments fund the Lake Erie Binational Public Forum (Forum). This diverse and active group serves many purposes ranging from developing and implementing outreach projects and initiatives to educate the general public about Lake Erie issues, to providing advice to the LaMP Work Group based on members' individual expertise and/or input from local constituents they may represent. The Forum works closely with the governmental representatives on the Lake Erie LaMP Work Group.

This chapter presents a report of current public outreach efforts, not necessarily a *complete one*. Ongoing public involvement is crucial to the success of the Lake Erie LaMP, and public participation, consultation, and comment are welcome at any time in the Lake Erie LaMP process.

### 7.2 Background and History

The original public involvement strategy for the LaMP was completed in April 1995. It described a three-tiered approach to involving the public. Tier I is the Lake Erie Public Forum, which is composed of members who are familiar with LaMP activities, who have the

most active level of public involvement in the LaMP and who have direct contact with the Lake Erie LaMP Work Group. Tier II, the Lake Erie Network, is composed of individuals and groups who have expressed an interest in the LaMP by attending meetings and workshops or by commenting on documents, and who have requested additional information about the LaMP. They form the mailing list for the Lake Erie LaMP. Tier III is the general public, with members being unfamiliar with the Lake Erie LaMP.

The Public Involvement Subcommittee provides information to the media about ongoing binational and local LaMP activities as a way of keeping the general public informed. When actions and activities related to the Lake Erie LaMP warrant, the lead agencies issue press releases to specific media markets to facilitate media exposure. The public is also reached through the use of displays and handouts at third party meetings, such as the International Joint Commission's biennial meetings. Information is also available through the LaMP websites that are provided at the end of this chapter.

In 1995, a questionnaire was distributed assessing the knowledge and involvement level of all individuals on the mailing list. The information requested was used to develop a public involvement and communication program to build teamwork between citizens and government agencies involved in accomplishing the goals of the LaMP.

## 7.3 Public Involvement Activities

### Ecosystem Objective Consultation

During the months of May and June 1995 the Public Involvement Subcommittee held four ecosystem objective workshops in Sandusky, Ohio; Dunkirk, New York; and in Simcoe and Leamington, Ontario. The government agencies used these workshops to solicit public input toward identifying the desired future uses, or ecosystem objectives, of the lake. These workshops served to bring members of the public together with agency representatives to direct Lake Erie LaMP efforts. These early workshops set the stage for what was to become a working group of concerned, involved residents of the Lake Erie basin who have joined together as the Lake Erie Binational Forum.

Building on the public workshops in 1995, an adaptive approach has been taken to consult with the public on the selection of a preferred ecosystem alternative. The Public Involvement Subcommittee first worked closely with a group of technical experts to create a method to communicate to the public how the LaMP's Ecosystem Objectives Subcommittee arrived at four viable scenarios (ecosystem alternatives) for Lake Erie's future state. Then, the Forum was consulted and adjustments made to assure that the explanation of the process could be simply presented and easily understood by the public. Once the Work Group selected a preferred Ecosystem Alternative, the Public Involvement Subcommittee sought the Forum's advice to develop a scripted presentation to explain how and why the Work Group chose this alternative. This presentation was used at a number of public sessions throughout the Lake Erie basin during late 2001/early 2002. These efforts have provided the Lake Erie Work Group and the Lake Erie Management Committee with valuable public input and insight.

### Status Report and Update

In its support role to the Work Group, the Public Involvement Subcommittee assisted in the production and distribution of the *Status Report* in the spring of 1999. A companion piece, called *Update '99*, was written and produced as the main distribution document to inform people about the issues in, and availability of, the *Status Report*. The *Update* mailing also served as a vehicle for informing the public about the availability of the various Beneficial Use Impairment Assessment Reports that the committee is responsible for distributing. Since then, the *Update* has become a regular publication of the LaMP, appearing every second year.

### Other Activities

In addition to the activities already mentioned, the Public Involvement Subcommittee was involved in a variety of outreach activities. These include the production of the following

documents: 1) Fact Sheet giving an overview of Lake Erie LaMP development, printed in Fall 1995 and revised in November 1996; 2) Distribution of educational posters entitled *Lake Erie Fish and Fishery* and *Waterbirds of Lake Erie* that were developed by various United States and Canadian government agencies involved with the LaMP; and 3) Creation and distribution of bookmarks with the URL for the binational LaMP website. The Public Involvement Subcommittee also created a display to be taken to meetings to inform the public about the LaMP.

## 7.4 Lake Erie Binational Public Forum

The Lake Erie Binational Public Forum marked its tenth anniversary in September 2005 at a meeting in Port Stanley, Ontario. Ten years ago, the government agencies involved in the LaMP created the Forum, recognizing that public input is critical to the LaMP's success. The Forum is a unique group of interested stakeholders from Canada and the U.S., including: farmers, business people, scientists, educators, anglers, boaters, environmentalists, governmental officials, labour leaders, public health workers and others. These individuals have brought together their talents, interests and concern for Lake Erie, to provide input on the planning and implementation of the LaMP, and to foster effective two-way communication with the diverse population of the Lake Erie basin.

The work of the Binational Forum is primarily a voluntary effort, although some members have a direct link to the group because of their occupations. Members often drive several hours to attend Forum meetings, which are held two to three times a year on alternating sides of the border. Despite the time and distance involved, the majority of Forum members have remained active throughout the last decade, proving their interest and dedication.

The Forum has three main roles and functions including:

- playing a significant role in the LaMP process with real involvement and proactive initiatives;
- increasing stakeholder participation in the LaMP process; and
- facilitating and/or participating in Forum sponsored LaMP related activities at the local level.

In order to accomplish these three roles and functions, the Forum acts as a partner with governments and governmental agencies in goal setting and decision making; assists the Technical Subcommittees in drafting LaMP reports and reviewing Work Group documents; provides advice and input to the Work Group and Management Committee in developing and implementing the LaMP; and promotes the Forum's vision and goals for Lake Erie. Forum members are also committed to taking information from the LaMP back to the community in a form that can be understood by the public. In this capacity, Forum members provide a valuable link to thousands of stakeholders throughout the basin who they interact with in their professional and private lives.



Photo: Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

A highlight of the tenth anniversary meeting was the launch of the Forum's Lake Erie Lakewide Management Plan Implementation Project. In an effort to demonstrate Lake Erie LaMP implementation at the local watershed level, the Forum worked with partners from Kettle Creek, Ontario and Black River, Ohio to create community-based watershed strategies and build local capacity for ongoing ecosystem stewardship.

The purpose of the strategies was to:

- Prioritize environmental concerns of the local watershed communities;
- Identify activities to address these concerns that also complement the goals of the Lake Erie LaMP; and
- Build local frameworks for ongoing implementation of the identified activities.

As part of the strategy development process, the Forum identified common issues, or barriers, to improving water quality and watershed management in each of the case study watersheds with respect to land use, human health and emerging issues. Upon further research, many of the barriers identified in the case study watersheds were found to be common problems in other watershed communities throughout the Lake Erie Basin. The Forum subsequently developed a series of three reports, one for each topic area, that more broadly describes common concerns and provides recommendations to address those issues at the local and state level. The watershed strategies and the reports are available on the Forum's website: <http://www.erieforum.org/watershedprojects.php>.

By conducting this process concurrently in Canadian and U.S. watersheds, the Forum identified opportunities for communities around Lake Erie to apply the experience gained through this project and fostered increased local stewardship activities that benefit the basinwide ecosystem.

Evidence of the success of the implementation project was provided by Forum members from New York. These members introduced and gained Forum support for another implementation project in the Cattaraugus Creek - Zoar Watershed in New York.

## 7.5 Ongoing and Upcoming Activities

The Public Involvement Subcommittee is at present working on improvement of the Binational LaMP website. Placed online in 1998, the site currently has basic information about the LaMP and its organizational structure, as well as publications or products of the LaMP. We are seeking to make it a place where the public can go to answer their questions and learn about the Lake Erie LaMP.

## 7.6 How to Get Involved

If you would like to receive information as it becomes available, go to the binational websites:

[www.on.ec.gc.ca/water/greatlakes/lakes/erie](http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/water/greatlakes/lakes/erie); [www.epa.gov/glnpo/lakeerie/](http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/lakeerie/); or [www.binational.net](http://www.binational.net). Or join the Lake Erie Network by contacting, Marlene O'Brien, Environment Canada, or Daniel O'Riordan, U.S. EPA.

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If you would like to become a member of the Forum, please contact Teresa Hollingsworth in Canada, or Peter Wise in the United States.

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